DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 625 RC 015 862

AUTHOR Mock, Karen R.
TITLE Multicultural Education in Early Childhood: A Developmental Rationale.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Multicultural Education (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, November 1981).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Cognitive Development; Cultural Differences; Cultural Exchange; Cultural Pluralism; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Enrichment; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Philosophy; Ethnicity; Foreign Countries; *Multicultural Education; Social Integration; Teacher Education; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

In order to place multiculturalism at the center of early childhood curriculum and practices in Canadian schools, relevant materials must be developed and teachers must be trained to teach in a multicultural society. The rationale for multicultural education at the early childhood level is found in principles of child development in terms of what is known about how children develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally and the implications of that development. For a child from a cultural background different from the teacher's or the majority of children, curriculum content which builds on the child's experiences will be more easily incorporated into existing cognitive structure and be more readily learned/understood. Teachers who know something about every child's background and use that knowledge to make the child feel comfortable with the material will increase a child's security, sense of belonging, and self-confidence, thereby enhancing learning and adaptation to school and Canadian culture in general. Because early experience influences later development, if young children are exposed to various ethnic groups and multicultural material in early childhood as an integral part of a curriculum, they will learn that multiculturalism is an integral part of life. This will facilitate participation as adults in Canada's multicultural society. (NEC)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED280625

# MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A DEVELOPMENTAL RATIONALE

KAREN R. MOCK, Ph.D.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Karen R. Mock.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Presented at the National Conference on Multicultural Education, Winnipeg, Manitoba, November, 1981. In McLeod, K. (Ed.) Multicultural Early Childhood Education: a Resource Book, Toronto, Ontario, 1984
University of Toronto Guidance Centre

RC015862

# Multicultural Education in Early Childhood: A Developmental Rationale

Karen R. Mock, Ph.D.

The recent report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education of the Young Child[1] noted uneasiness among many ethnic groups whose children form an increasing proportion of our school population. Parents spoke of subtle discrimination on the part of educators, who often lack an understanding of and a sympathy for their cultures, with the result that their children have a harder time and do not do as well in school as they could. Many of these parents are reluctant to visit the school because they feel their English is inadequate or because their traditions put the school beyond reproach, while some parents feel intimidated by their lack of education and sometimes by their poverty.

With these factors in mind, the Commission suggested "first of all, that we recognize that a child's lists of rights includes those of historical heritage and, secondly, that we accept that we live in a multicultural society. Multiculturalism must be at the centre of the curriculum and of the practices in our schools". In order to achieve these important goals, relevant materials must be developed for use in schools, and teachers must be trained to teach in a multicultural society.

Teacher Education in a Multicultural Society

In 1977, Daniel Hill, writing on human rights in Canada, also urged that the answer to many of the racial and ethnic tensions in schools was to be found in improved teacher education. Hill suggested, as have others, that teachers' colleges and ministries of education, in consultation with visible minorities and other ethnic groups, should design a compulsory course of studies to inform student teachers about the history and nature of discrimination in Canada, the histories and cultures of minority groups, and legislative action against discrimination.[2] Such background is necessary not only in pre-service teacher training, but also through practical in-service programmes and professional development courses. Clearly, a major goal of teacher education today, as for any provider of community and social service, must be "a wide enough knowledge of different types of societies and exposure to a broad enough array of customary behaviours and modes of communication" so that the teacher is prepared to notice and understand behaviours outside her/his cultural experience.[3] While it may be impractical to try to learn details about all ethnic groups, the sensitive teacher will use colleagues, support personnel, and ultimately, the children and their parents as the sources of knowledge about the cultural values and expectations that are operating in any given situation.

However, this is often easier said than done. In the absence of relevant multicultural material or appropriate personnel, the teacher may not be aware of the important influence a child's background can have on classroom behaviour. The teacher may therefore misinterpret a child's reactions to the programme, as illustrated in the following example:

> As part of an integrated unit on Nutrition, the teacher is presenting a lesson on the classification of various foods into their groups (fruits & vegetables, meat & equivalents, milk group, bread & cereals, and extras). She is well prepared. Based on her knowledge of how children learn, she has included various audio-visual aids and several concrete props in an effort to motivate the children and enhance participation. In general, she has succeeded, for most of the children clustered around her table are volunteering answers to her questions and participating enthusiastically in the discussion. Most are able to complete the follow-up classification activities successfully, and some even go beyond what was required by colouring the pictures or working on a related creative activity.
>
> But one little boy, a recent newcomer to Canada from the West Indies, doesn't respond as enthusiastically as the teacher had hoped this afternoon. He stands at the back of the group, his eyes looking down a great deal of the time. He does not volunteer answers or participate in the discussion; and when called upon, he mumbles so that the teacher asks him to repeat himself and the other children either giggle or look perplexed. He doesn't seem to know what to do during activity time; and after some encouragement, those activities he does attempt are done either incompletely or incorrectly. The teacher interprets his behaviour as shy, withdrawn, possibly even delayed or slow; and since this is the usual pattern in other parts of the programme, she will likely report her perceptions to his parents for remedial help, ESL/D classes, special education, or whatever special programmes are available in her Board, or simply continue to face the daily frustration of trying to "get through" to the child and "bring him out" while working with approximately thirty other children.

For any teacher who has faced the reality of trying to integrate a newcomer or minority group child into the regular classroom, it is not difficult to identify with the scenario described above. Rather than "shy, withdrawn, and slow", another child's behaviour might seem to be "aggressive, impulsive and hostile", but the problem remains: How do I help this child adjust to my classroom and succeed in my programme when I'm under such time constraints and can't give him the kind of attention I think he needs?

For any parent who has faced the reality of hearing a child described in a way that seems totally unfamiliar and not fully understood, it is not difficult to identify with that nagging fear of the child's failure in a school system whose ways seem inappropriate to meet those important goals that they feel only education can secure. For the parent the problem remains: How can I tell the teacher what my child is really like and what I expect from him and why? And how can I learn what I need to know about Canadian schools when I'm under such personal constraints?

And for the child who faces the daily reality of unfamiliar faces, strange language or accent, different school system, and the insecurity of constant change, although he may not be able to articulate it, the terrifying problem remains:

How can I learn what I have to know here and get through it with some degree of self-esteem when I can't even make my teachers and parents understand me and what I'm going through?

The teacher described above is well-intentioned. From the extensive preparation of the nutrition lesson, it is clear she is up to date on cognitive-developmental teaching strategies; and from her concern for the little boy, it is clear she is a sensitive teacher interested in the individuals in her class. However, had the teacher known more about the child's language and experiences, she would have realized she was not using the appropriate materials to teach that child in the way she knew she should be according to the cognitive developmental approach she had been taught. For example, even though the child spoke English, what the teacher was calling a "pear" (Bartlett) looked nothing like any "pear" (Avocado) he had ever seen; and the teacher's "apple" (an Ontario MacIntosh, so common to all the other children) hardly resembled what this child knew to be an "apple" (the sweet "star apple" of Jamaica). Most of the other fruits and vegetables he had never seen, let alone tasted or eaten to know whether they had seeds or not (a concept very important to one of the classification tasks to follow). So the child's reluctance to participate in discussion was not due to slowness or shyness (except possibly for embarrassment because of his dialect and the other children's reactions).

And his problem with the later tasks was certainly not for lack of ability or motivation. The fact is that without any previous experience with these foods that were so common to all the other children, the higher order classification tasks were beyond his conceptual understanding. How different and exciting it would have been for him had the teacher included a mango that none of the other children could identify. And how interesting (and exciting) might it have been for the other children had a plantain been included so he could have corrected them when they called it a "big banana".

I could have chosen a child representing any culture different from the dominant group in any school or community, for the classroom situation described above is a common occurrence for the minority group child in many aspects of the curriculum. The minority child not only feels different but also feels confused, inadequate, inferior, isolated by the peer group, and often misjudged by the teacher. This inhibits the child's learning and also reinforces incorrect stereotypes for the teacher and the other children. However, with some assistance to the teacher in the area of multicultural programming, the typical scenario can be turned around so that the child feels valued, with more positive self-esteem, greater acceptance by the peer group, and more accurate understanding by the teacher. The child's learning is enhanced because it has foundation in his own experience; and the teacher and the other children are enriched by learning something outside the realm

of their usual experience (mangoes and plantain are delicious!)

Multicultural education doesn't eliminate differences but builds on cultural diversity as a strength in the classroom and in our Canadian society. Furthermore the rationale for multicultural education at the early childhood level is to be found in the principles of child development, that is, in terms of what we know about how children develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and the implications of that development for effective teaching and learning.

Early Learning and Early Teaching

Most teachers of young children today have given a great deal of thought to how children learn and how to teach them most effectively. In the cognitive or intellectual domain, current theory and research (most notably the work of Jean Piaget and his followers) have demonstrated that children learn best through the conceptual understanding that comes with direct experience and the manipulation of concrete objects through free play and uninhibited exploration.

It has also been demonstrated that, as children develop, they move through qualitiatively different stages of cognitive organization, with these stages affecting the style, structure, and content of what a child learns from a given task, at a given stage, depending on the child's previous experiences.

In the sensory-motor period (birth to two years) the child moves from reflexive and unco-ordinated body movements to complex co-ordination of motor and perceptual behaviour patterns by interacting with the environment, and from a stage of complete egocentrism with no distinction between self and outer reality to the internalization of sensory-motor behaviour patterns and the beginnings of symbolic representation.
The preoperational period (approximately two to seven years) is characterized by egocentric thinking expressed in animism, artificialism, realism and magic omnipotence. During this stage of early childhood, the child moves through the preconceptual stage during which he develops perceptual constancy and representation through drawings, language dreams, and symbolic play; and then through the perceptual or intuitive stage, when prelogical reasoning appears, and when trial and error may lead to an intuitive discovery; but the child is unable to take more than one attribute into account at one time.

The concrete operational period (seven to eleven years) is characterized by thought that is logical and reversible. The child understands the logic of classes and relations and can co-ordinate series and part-whole relationships dealing with concrete things.

During the formal operational period (eleven to adulthood), propositional logic develops, and the child is able to reason from a hypothesis to all its conclusions, however theoretical. This involves second-order operations or thinking about abstract theories rather than concrete realities.

Werner (1979), has summarized the cross-cultural research which corraborates the Piagetian notion of qualitatively different stages of cognitive development in the early years and has demonstrated the importance of background and experience on some of the quantitative aspects of development.

Educators have translated Piagetian theory into the activity-based curriculum where children "learn by doing" and where teachers, who are thoroughly familiar with the developmental stages of children, act as facilitators of learning by providing an enriching learning environment and then guiding the children through the appropriate activities for their developmental level (cf Elkind (1976); Weikart et al (1971).

Children learn, however, not only through direct experience, but also vicariously, by observing the behaviour of others and by imitating or modelling that behaviour, especially if the other person is significant to the child (eg. parent, teacher) and if the behaviour is seen to be rewarded or successful (Bandura, 1977). The teacher is a very powerful model for what

she/he feels is appropriate classroom behaviour, just as the parents are very influential role models in terms of attitudes towards other people and the value of education.

Not only do we now understand how children learn, but many parents and teachers are surprised to discover how early that learning occurs. As is pointed out by Hannah Polowy elsewhere in this volume, international research and child study has demonstrated that by the time children are six years old, they have developed learning styles language patterns, personality characteristics, learning potential, and attitudes and values that will stay with them the rest of their lives. Burton White (1978) and others have long emphasized the importance of early experience and environment on later cognitive, social, and emotional development.

And so, armed with our insights into child development and encouraged by current trends in teacher education, teachers of young children are designing and adapting their programmes to include lots of "hands on" materials, providing a wide variety of enriching early childhood activities to build on each child's experiences thereby to enhance their intellectual and psycho-social development.

However, while in theory these cognitively-based developmental teaching strategies should apply to all children, the

actual content of the curriculum material used is virtually dominated by the majority culture which is usually represented by the teacher and at least several children in the class. Most early childhood materials presuppose a common body of preschool cultural experiences including nursery rhymes, games, stories, usual foods, popular animals, knowledge of seasons, "Canadian" holiday celebrations, and even similar interaction patterns with adults. Most of the planned activities in a preschool or kindergarten class are conducted orally, requiring listening skills, discussion skills, and independence in following through with activities and classroom routines, often requiring free choice and independent work habits. Rarely does a teacher stop to reflect on how culturally biased are our expectations for the classroom behaviour and abilities of even a very young child.

The parents also have expectations for what will happen in school and these expectations will be a result of their own backgrounds and school-related experiences. The child's expectations stem from his or her treatment by significant adults prior to the present teacher and also will be influenced by previous experience with children in and out of school. Teachers, parents, and children all have expectations about school based on their cultural backgrounds and experiences- - - expectations which may or may not be realistic, and which, when ethnic or minority groups are involved, usually do not match reality.

Culture Shock: Expectation vs. Reality

Cultural adaptation is just another form of human adaptation to change, involving readjustment with all its accompanying psychological side effects. Culture "shock" occurs when the individual finds himself caught between two sets of values, manners, customs, and/or languages, and when cultural readjustment is accompanied by feelings of isolation, loneliness, alienation, and particularly powerlessness and helplessness. The degree of culture shock is related to how discrepant one's expectations are from the realities that exist. How different is the situation the child is in from what he or she expected? What did the child's family expect? And how discrepant is the child's behaviour from what the teacher expects from a child that age in response to the same material? The source of the discrepancy between expectation and reality is in the backgrounds of all the parties involved.

The first school experience represents a culture shock and period of adjustment for any child and family. No longer is the child as close to the centre of attention as he or she was at home. Suddenly there are many children, and the child is expected to interact with them and share. In many cases, parents must hand the child over to a complete stranger in a programme they may know very little about. Teachers know a great deal about some children and families to aid in this adjustment to school, and we know virtually nothing about others.

That is, if the child comes from the same cultural background as the teacher, the teacher knows his or her language, understands something about the family structure and verbal and non-verbal communication patterns, holds similar views as the child's family towards the role of children and the value of education, and is aware of the most likely early experiences, stories, and games the child has learned. But the average teacher does not have the same insights into the backgrounds and lives of all of the children in the classroom. The more a teacher knows about a child's family structure, parent/child relationships, education, religion, superstitions, attitudes, values, and experiences, the better prepared that teacher will be to help in the child's and family's adjustment. Education is the key to making expectations match reality--teacher, child, and parent education alike. But children are more flexible than adults, and time is on their side. By interpreting Canadian cultures and the school system to young children, we will help them adjust to their new situation (including other children, languages, new family structures, changing relationships and norms of behaviour) more easily and enable them to enrich this country through their increased initiative and self-confidence in years to come.[4] A teacher who is knowledgeable in child development and also knows something about cultural influences on the child and family will be best equipped to facilitate adjustment and alleviate culture shock in school by knowing the source of the discrepancies between expectation and reality,

and by attempting to meet the needs of parent and child with understanding and empathy.

Children's Needs

Parents and teachers must be aware of the basic needs of all children and how to recognize when any of those needs is not satisfied. Maslow summarized these needs in a series of levels as a hierarchy in order of importance as follows:

1. Physiological needs for food, rest, shelter, exercise;
2. Safety and security needs for protection against danger, threat, deprivation;
3. Social needs for belonging, acceptance, friendship, love;
4. Esteem needs for self-confidence, independence, achievement, competence, self-esteem, self-respect;
5. Self-actualization needs for realizing one's own potential, continued self-development, creativity, fulfillment.

This hierarchy of importance suggests that the lower level needs should be satisfied before children are able to achieve their potential. A hungry, tired, or fearful child is less able to be accepted by the group and will learn less effectively than the child who eats regularly, is well rested, and feels secure. If a child feels threatened, unloved, or worthless, he cannot reach self-actualization. That is, if a child feels he does not belong in the classroom, has no friends, and senses

that even the teacher seems uncaring, he cannot possibly develop the necessary self-esteem for achievement, self-confidence and competence; and without self-esteem, a person cannot maximize his/her potential and self-fulfillment. Learning will suffer considerably because the deprivation most people experience with respect to the lower level needs diverts energy primarily into the struggle to satisfy those needs, and the needs for self-fulfillment, personal growth and learning remain secondary.

A child's ethnic identity is part of his or her individuality, an integral part of the total self-concept; and trying to ignore or erase cultural ties can only lower self-esteem. The teacher who is sensitive to the emotional needs of the children and can create an environment in which every child feels secure and a sense of belonging, is well on the way to ensuring positive self-concepts and maximizing learning. To be effective, teachers should introduce multicultural concepts and content into their programmes as early as possible, while taking into consideration the cognitive levels, emotional needs, specific environmental conditions, and particular cultural development of the children.[5] This may take some extra preparation time on the part of the teacher, but the teaching rewards are many when every child feels an equal part of the programme and shares a positive relationship with the teacher.

Encouraging multiculturalism at the early childhood level will benefit all children. By using multicultural resource material, teachers will help children from all backgrounds gain self-esteem and pride in their cultural heritage. Multicultural education must promote acceptance of one's own background and the understanding and acceptance of the backgrounds of others, thereby ensuring that all Canadian children will have a better opportunity to meet their needs and to realize their full human potential.

## Education in a Multicultural Society

Wahlstrom (1979) has suggested that the patterns of mobility of the future make it essential that future inhabitants of the globe not be handicapped by attitudes of ignorance, intolerance and lack of respect for the values of other cultures. But even without travel, the current social environment of most Canadian children can be described as multicultural.

The exposure to a variety of cultures enriches the learning experience of all children, including those of the predominant group. If we are preparing children to enter their place in a culturally diverse society, then bringing in material and activities relevant to various ethnic groups (not necessarily represented in the class) can be exciting, interesting, and ultimately worthwhile. Holiday celebrations, national days,

and special family events lend themselves beautifully to the teacher's introducing ethnic variations in practice; and, usually, the children's families, community resources and personnel are available to the teacher for advanced planning.[6]

Even very young children exhibit prejudices against members of other groups - - prejudices that tend to perpetuate themselves, especially where there is no opportunity for the children to learn otherwise. Teachers must not leave this learning to chance. They must structure situations such that children of different ethnic and racial groups cooperate rather than compete, and participate in each others cultural celebrations and activities, rather than merely observing them. In today's multicultural society, it is not appropriate for teachers to ignore cultural differences. Teachers must help children learn to accept and appreciate their differences while learning to accept cultural diversity as the normal make-up of the Canadian society in which they will become adults. Multiculturalism must be just as much an integral and continuous part of the school curriculum as it is a fundamental part of Canadian society today. The present volume is a step in that direction - - a manual of multicultural resource material to be used by parents and early childhood educators on a regular basis as a supplement when planning activities for young children.

Conclusion

In terms of child development then, the rationale for multicultural education at the early childhood level is two-fold. First, for a child from a cultural background different from the teacher's or the majority of children, curriculum content which builds on his or her experiences will be more easily incorporated into the existing cognitive structure and be more readily learned and understood. A teacher who knows something about every child's background and uses that knowledge to make the child feel comfortable with the material, will increase a child's security, sense of belonging, and self-confidence, thereby enhancing learning. This will greatly facilitate the child's adaptation to school and to Canadian culture in general.

Secondly, because early experience influences later development, if young children are exposed to various ethnic groups and multicultural material in early childhood as an integral part of their programme, they will learn, at an early age, that multiculturalism is an integral part of life. Regardless of their race or ethnicity, this will facilitate their later participation as adults in Canada's multicultural society.

FOOTNOTES

1. To Herald a Child, The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education of the Young Child. Laurier LaPierre, Commissioner; Toronto, Ontario, 1981. Available through the Ontario Public School Men Teachers' Federation.

2. Although several courses are offered at universities and teachers' colleges throughout the country on an optional or elective basis, the only compulsory course for pre-service teachers of which I am aware was developed from 1978 to 1982 and taught by the present author in the Early Childhood Education Department at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. The course is no longer being offerred, but information on pre-service and in-service programs for teachers may be obtained by writing the author 167 Ava Road, Toronto, Ontario M6C 1W6.

3. Dorothy Herberg makes this point in her paper "Ethnicity and Multiculturalism in Social Work Education," York University, 1978.

4. The Child Adapting to Canadian Culture, Dellcrest Children's Centre, Downsview, Ontario, 1977, one of a series of pamphlets published for teachers.

5. The Manitoba Teachers' Society recently issued a similar statement to all teachers in a pamphlet prepared by the Professional Development Committee entitled Multiculturalism in Education.

6. Although the best resources are the children and their families, many Boards of Education, community centres, and govenment agencies have resource materials and consultants available. One such resource describing holidays and celebrations is Days to Remember: Observances of Significance in our Multicultural Society. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, 1977.

## REFERNCES


Bandura, A., Social Learning Theory, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977

Elkind, D., Child Development and Education: A Piagentian Perspective, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976

Herberg, Dorothy, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism in Social Work Education. Unpublished manuscript, York University, 1978.

Hill, Daniel G., Human Rights in Canada: A Focus on Racism. Otttawa: The Canadian Labour Congress, 1977

Maslow, A. H., Toward a Psychology of Being. New York, D. Van Nostrand, 1962

Wahlstrom, M. et al, Early Childhood Education. Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario. 1979

Weikart, D. et al, The Cognitively Oriented Curriculum: A Framework for Preschool Teachers. Washington, D.C. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1971

Werner, E. E., Cross-cultural Child Development. Monterey: Wadsworth, Inc., Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1979

White, B., Experience and Environment. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1978.